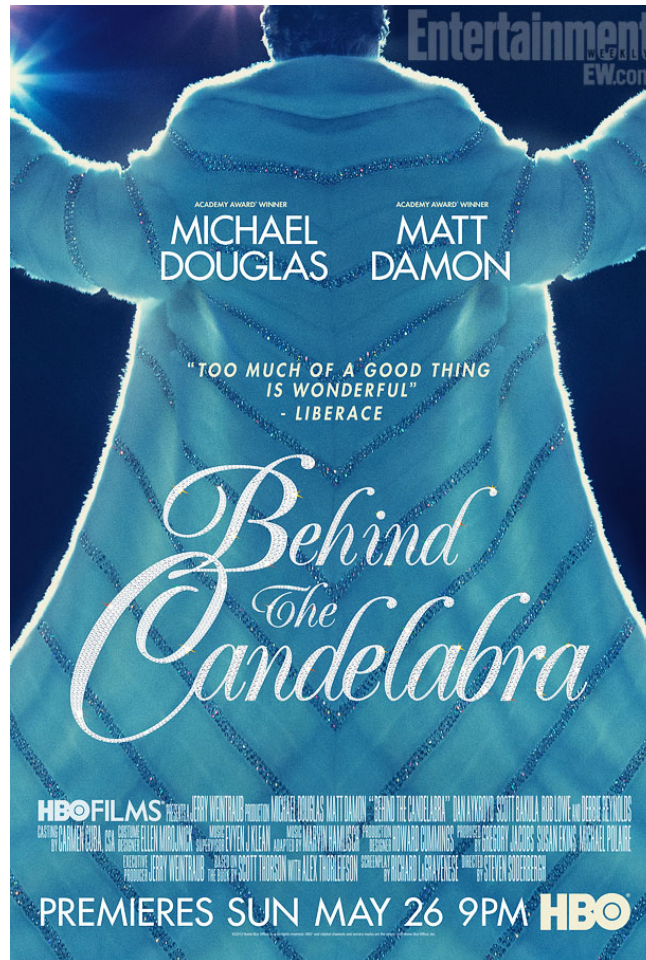


BEHIND THE CANDELABRA
By Lorraine Viade, PsyD



Behind the Candelabra is the story of the love affair between the famous and outrageously flamboyant Liberace and his live-in companion Scott Thorson. The two men shared their lives for five years. This is long enough to be considered a couple by any standards. Back in those days, when many gay men were still in the closet, Liberace was pretending on the one hand to be straight (insert meaningful wink here) while displaying what was kept inside his closet for full view on the stage. Don't ask and I won't tell was the rule back then.

For those of us who grew up watching Liberace on television, the story is no surprise. What did surprise me was how well done this HBO made-for-cable film is. Michael Douglas is superb as the aging king of the queens whose talent was as large as his persona. Matt Damon steals the show, however, as a naive man whose own troubled past made him the perfect candidate for being lured into a life of excess and extravagance with the maestro who longed to be loved by his own image. (Insert a little ewww here). Narcissus thy name was Liberace.

The story is rampant with mother issues, loss, grief, faith and confusion, draped in lush, over-the-top settings, matching outfits, stray animals and stray lovers. Behind it all, however, is a gut-wrenching honesty about what it was like to be those men at that time and place. Douglas and Damon bring such sensitivity and authenticity to their roles. You could see the genuine affection and attraction they have for each other, beyond the roles. I remember thinking how talented a piano player Liberace was and when he died how sad that all his talent and money and fame could not secure him with lasting happiness. How sad.

All relationships have ebbs and flows, ups and downs. Say what you will about the age difference and the mutual exploitation, the morality issues never override the genuine sentiment between them – nor should they. These men really cared about each other even when things were not good between them. They seemed to understand a common loneliness, and a longing that could not be fulfilled within the confines of one person. More often than not, such is life. People turn to sex, drugs, fame and all other forms of self-soothing, self-medicating and self-injuring behaviors for one reason or another. *Behind the Candelabra* gives us a glimpse into one story. There are many more to be told. HBO seems to want to tell them.

I give *Behind the Candelabra* four pianos.

